DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 321 RC 020 042

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TITLE Opinions of Inclusive Education: A Survey of New Mexico Teachers and Administrators.
PUB DATE Mar 95
NOTE 10p.; In: Reaching to the Future: Boldly Facing Challenges in Rural Communities. Conference Proceedings of the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES) (Las Vegas, Nevada, March 15-18, 1995); see RC 020 016.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Educational Change; *Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; Rural Education; *Rural Schools; Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Individuals With Disabilities Education Act; *New Mexico

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the knowledge and acceptance level of special and general education teachers and administrators regarding inclusive education within the rural and diverse state of New Mexico. While inclusive education of disabled students has gained widespread support, little attention has been paid to program implementation within a rural and poor state such as New Mexico. The evolution of the inclusive education movement began with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Passage of the IDEA led to the Regular Education Initiative movement, whose goal was to merge special and regular education into one system and provide instructional services to disabled children in regular classrooms. An outgrowth of the REI was the full inclusion movement, which focused on strengthening not only the academic performance of disabled students in regular classroom settings, but also socialization skills, attitudes, and positive peer relations. Thirty-nine of 60 special educators attending a 1993 New Mexico conference returned a survey following a presentation on inclusive education. While the majority of educators were supportive of inclusive education, a small percentage (7-15 percent) were consistently nonsupportive. Specifically, nonsupportive respondents desired the continuation of resource rooms and expressed uneasiness about therapists or consultants jointly teaching with them in general education classrooms. Survey results indicate areas of confusion concerning application of inclusive educational practices. However, at the time, none of the school districts represented at the conference had implemented inclusive education. Survey questions and results are included. (LP)

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OPINIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SURVEY OF NEW MEXICO TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

ABSTRACT

ED 381 321

Recently, a great deal of discussion and controversy has been generated regarding fully inclusive education for students with disabilities. Proponents of inclusive education have questioned the effectiveness of pull-out programs and a dual system of education. The present study is an effort to assess the knowledge and acceptance level of fully inclusive education of teachers of special education and general education, and administrators within the rural, culturally, and linguistically diverse state of New Mexico. Inclusive education implementation within a rural state will, of necessity, begin with educators and administrators, therefore their knowledge and acceptance level of this philosophy will be of prime concern. In response to this concern, the present project was undertaken to determine the knowledge and acceptance level of these professionals. Sixty professionals in attendance at the February, 1993 New Mexico's Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) State Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico were surveyed during a presentation on Inclusive Education. The results of the present study indicate that while the majority of professionals are generally supportive of inclusive education, a small percentage 7-15%, are consistently nonsupportive on all items with considerable disagreement on nine items.

RC 020042

OPINIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:
A SURVEY OF NEW MEXICO TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Recently, a great deal of discussion and controversy has been generated regarding fully inclusive education of students with disabilities. Proponents of inclusive education have questioned the effectiveness of pull-out programs and a dual system of education. In general, proponents of inclusive education cited the unnecessary segregation and labeling of children combined with the ineffective practice of mainstreaming, which splinters a student's academic and social life, as justification for removing the current dual system (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1992).

The present study was an effort to assess the knowledge and acceptance level of fully inclusive education by teachers of special and general education, and administrators within the rural, culturally and linguistically diverse State of New Mexico. While this philosophy has gained widespread support, relatively little attention has been paid to its implementation within an isolated, rural, and relatively economically poor state. Implementation of inclusive education within a rural state will, of necessity, begin with educators and administrators, therefore their knowledge and acceptance level of this philosophy will be of prime concern. The present project was undertaken, in response to this concern, to determine the knowledge and acceptance level of these professionals.

Introduction

Congress stated during research for the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), that there were over 8 million children with disabilities in the United States and that more than one half of them did not receive appropriate educational services. In addition, state and local educational agencies' financial resources were inadequate to meet the special education needs of children with disabilities. The purpose of IDEA was to ensure that all children with disabilities had access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) which included special education and related services as needed by the child [20 USC Section 1400(b)(1-8)(c)].

Regular Education Initiative (REI)

A reform movement, whose roots were within special education, designed to provide a FAPE for all children was the Regular Education Initiative or REI (York, Vandercook, MacDonald, Heise-Neff, & Caughey, 1992). The REI provided instructional services for children with disabilities delivered in the regular classroom setting. The REI leaders had several distinguishable goals. The first goal was to merge special and general education into one system. The second goal was to increase dramatically the number of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms using full-time mainstreaming across the continuum. The third goal was to strengthen the academic achievement of students with mild and moderate disabilities in addition to underachievers (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

Fuchs and Fuchs (1994) found that REI supporters generated tactics to restructure general and special education while moving greater numbers of students with disabilities into general education. The first tactics involved acquiring waivers from state and federal rules and regulations for restructuring the use of special education resources. Another tactic was to modify the nature of the continuum of services generally advocated in special education to determine least restrictive educational placement of students with disabilities. The elimination of the bottom (homebound, residential placement) and the near-top (resource rooms) of the continuum was advocated by REI proponents. Finally, it was proposed that large-scale mainstreaming would be

accomplished best by eliminating the near-top of the continuum. To succeed at large-scale mainstreaming the general education classrooms had to become more academically and socially responsive settings for students with disabilities. This was first accomplished by individualizing instruction for all students, and secondly by developing cooperative learning. The advocates of REI were reluctant to alienate special education teachers and administrators. Despite calls for waivers, modifications of the continuum of services, reorganization of general education classrooms, most REI reforms did not advocate an end to special education. Special Education teachers were to become co-teachers with the general education staff (D'Alonzo & Boggs, 1990; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

Based upon the latest reports from the Carnegie Council, the Holmes Group, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, and the National Governors' Association report, the tactics advocated by REI seemed consistent with the findings of these reports. Therefore, it was assumed that general education would welcome the REI, but general education was uninterested in the REI (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

Inclusion

An outgrowth of the REI was the Full Inclusion movement. Inclusion, inclusive schooling, inclusive education were all terms of the movement to educate all children in general education (York, et al., 1992). Increasingly, special education reform was symbolized by the term inclusive schools. It meant decentralization of power and the concomitant empowerment of teachers and building-level administrators, a fundamental reorganization of the teaching and learning process through innovations like cooperative learning and thematic teaching, and the redefinition of professional relationships within buildings (D'Alonzo & Boggs, 1990; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

Based on the extensive research and the experiences of Pearpoint, Forest, & Snow (1992), inclusive education came to mean for them children being educated in heterogeneous, age-appropriate classroom, school and community environments which maximized the social development of everyone. The vision of full inclusion was based on the belief that all individuals had the right and the dignity to achieve their potential within society. A fully inclusive school valued friendships and diversity as significant outcomes of schooling. Skills and values essential to successful participation in a diverse, integrated society were acquired during an individual's time in school. A school which fully included all members of the school community fostered interdependence, respected and valued diversity, and taught the skills necessary to bring out the best in everyone. Full inclusion, through circles of support, maps, and friendship, nourished success through interdependence and collaboration (Pearpoint, Forest, & Snow 1992).

The growing impetus for inclusive education was found in the following statistics which described special education students who were generally classified as mildly or moderately disabled and generally mainstreamed into the general education classroom for part or all of the school day. Only 57% of students in special education graduate with either a diploma or a certificate of graduation; 12% of youth with disabilities have been arrested at some time in their lives, as compared with 8% in the general population; only 13.4% of all youth with disabilities, aged 15 to 20, are living independently up to two years after leaving secondary school as compared to 33.2% of the general post-secondary school population; and only 49% of out-of-school youth with disabilities aged 15-20 are employed between 1 and 2 years after high school (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1992).

Many proponents of inclusion were in favor of abolishing special education and the continuum of services. Pearpoint et al., (1992) proponents of eliminating the continuum, were quick to point out that while they wish to see an end to special education teachers and students, they are not advocating dumping or moving children with disabilities into general education classrooms without appropriate support. Specialists of all types would follow the children into the mainstream, where services would be available to all students. In contrast to inclusion's focus on socialization skills, attitude change, and positive peer relations, REI advocates' primary concern was to strengthen the academic performance of students with disabilities and those at risk for school failure (D'Alonzo & Boggs, 1990; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

Top-down educational reforms of the past have fallen short of the goal of improving the learning of New Mexico's students. Recent initiatives by the New Mexico State Legislature and the State Board of Education supported and encouraged school reform which were developed by the local community , e.g., site based management. The New Mexico State Department of Education recently passed *Standards for Excellence* which allowed schools to develop essential outcomes for all students and it provided a framework for each school to achieve individual state accreditation (New Mexico State Department of Education, 1991). The State Department of Education's Administrative Policy on Full Inclusion (1991) was as follows:

> The New Mexico State Department of Education believes that all students must be educated in school environments which fully include rather than exclude them. School environments include all curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs and activities. Full inclusion means that all children must be educated in supported, heterogeneous age-appropriate, natural, child-focused classrooms, school and community environments for the purpose of preparing them for full participation in our diverse and integrated society. The New Mexico State Department of Education supports, encourages and will facilitate emerging local practices and creative utilization of resources which address the full inclusion of all children in the local school and community. (p. 2)

Because the New Mexico State Department of Education supported inclusion, each school in New Mexico was challenged to adopt and implement practices which promote inclusion. The New Mexico State Department of Education recognized that the values and beliefs associated with inclusive education cannot be mandated. Consequently, it was the administrative policy of the New Mexico State Department of Education to support, influence, encourage, suggest and guide the local efforts of schools to evaluate and assess its values and beliefs about learning, children, and the school.

This current study was designed to survey New Mexico's educators and administrators on the knowledge and acceptance level of inclusive education. Based on the impetus from New Mexico's State Department of Education for providing inclusive education, the purpose of this study was to explore issues related to the value of New Mexico's State Department of Education campaign for inclusive education.

METHOD

Subjects

Sixty professionals in attendance at the February 1993 New Mexico's Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) State Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico were surveyed during a

presentation by one of the authors on Inclusive Education. Of these 60 teachers, 66% or 39 teachers responded to questions regarding number of years of teaching experience, current position, and grade level taught. Thirty-nine percent or 15 of the teachers had taught from 1 to 5 years, 21% or 9 had taught from 6 to 10 years, 25% or 10 had taught from 11 to 15 years and 15% or 5 had taught from 16 to 20 years with a mean number of years of experience of 8.28 years. Of the 39 professionals 5% (3) were currently in administration, 69% (26) were special education teachers, 19% (7) were in general education, and 7% (3) were in related services. 8% (3) of the professionals served at the preschool level, 62% (24) served at the elementary level, while 30% (12) were in secondary.

Instrument

A survey questionnaire, based on the research of Kennedy (1990) into Regular Education Initiative (REI), was modified for inclusive education specifically for this study. The instrument contained 22 items designed to measure professional's attitudes toward certain underlying assumptions or views of inclusive education proponents. A sample item of the former was "Students in special education can be educated in a regular classroom with assistance from the special education department". A sample of the latter type of item was "The skills needed to teach mildly disabled and nondisabled students are essentially the same". The professionals in attendance responded to each item on a 5-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Procedure

Each professional was handed a survey instrument upon entering the workshop session on Inclusive Education. Subjects were asked to return the survey by the end of the session or by mail within 4 weeks. After approximately 4 weeks from the return date, each subject who had not responded was contacted again, and asked to complete and return the survey. Sixty-six percent, or 39, of the 60 professional in attendance completed the survey.

RESULTS

Summary statistics for each survey item are presented in Appendix A. The percentile of responses for each item are ranked from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

As presented in Appendix A, the professionals' responses on a majority of the items were in support of inclusive education. The 9 items (3,6,11,13,14,15,17,18,22) selected in disagreement with inclusive education philosophy or practice appeared to indicate some mixed attitudes on the part of the professionals. The idea that special education students can be educated in a regular classroom with assistance was overwhelming supported (41% (15) agreed, 37% (14) strongly agreed), but the concept that the least restrictive environment can be a self-contained classroom, item 3, was accepted (22% (8) strongly agreed, and 40% (15) agreed). The statement that students with a learning disability who have spatial and time orientation problems would not profit from going to a resource room, item 11, was rejected (30% (11) disagreed and 30% (11) strongly disagreed). Item 14 which was the concept that with further preparation and training teachers would be able to effectively meet the educational needs of their resource room students was strongly disagreed with by 30% (11) while 22% (8) strongly agreed, and item 15 which indicated that with additional consultative support, the teachers would be able to meet the educational needs of their resource room students was strongly disagreed with by 41% (16) while 22% (8) strongly agreed. The results appeared to indicate some uncertainties on the part of these professionals. Items 17 and 18 were supportive of special

education and the labeling of students into special education categories, but item 6 indicated the professionals feel labeling diminishes students' self worth. Item 21 supported therapists providing services in a regular classroom by a narrow martin. Item 22 appeared to indicate, with 33% (12) agreeing and 30% (11) strongly agreeing, that teachers are uneasy about consultants' from special education spending time teaching and consulting in their classrooms.

In contrast to these nine disagreeing responses, the remaining 13 were supportive of inclusive education. Overall the professionals supported the concept of educating special education students in regular education by regular education teachers (items 1,2,5,9,10,16,20).

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study indicated that while the educational professionals were predominately supportive of inclusive education, a small percentage, 7-15%, were consistently nonsupportive of inclusive education. The results on the nine items of major disagreement tended to lend credence to the view that for selected New Mexico's professionals there were areas of confusion concerning inclusive education. Data collected for this project seemed to indicate that the concept of inclusive education was supported, but that the application of that concept to the professionals' individual classrooms was not equally supported. During the 1992-1993 academic year, none of the school districts represented by these professionals, were implementing inclusive education, but two districts were preparing to implement it during the 1994-1995 school year.

In rural New Mexico, a full spectrum of special education services were sometimes difficult to provide. Often, the special education teachers were required to teach all exceptionalities and all levels of severity in one room, sometimes with very limited related services. The basic assumption arising from these circumstances was that regular education would be the best location in rural New Mexico to provide for the needs of students with disabilities. Data collected for the project verified that these professionals viewed the regular classroom as an appropriate location for the education of special education students, but they also supported the continuation of resource rooms and expressed uneasiness about therapists or consultants jointly teaching with them in general education classrooms.

It could be argued that the sample for this study was too small to draw a valid conclusion. However, New Mexico currently is a small state with a limited professional population. The percentages of administrators, special education teachers, and related service personnel in this study were similar to the percentage of professionals in these categories in New Mexico. The individuals who attended the yearly CEC state conference were the educational leaders in New Mexico, therefore the results of this project could be viewed as indicative of the attitudes, and knowledge level of the professionals in New Mexico. Thus, the project results were generalized to the population of professional educators in New Mexico.

Based upon the conflicting attitudes evidenced in this study, additional research and dialogue among New Mexico's professionals will be needed before inclusive education is fully implemented in New Mexico. It would appear that additional work is required at the "grass roots level" if teachers are to be educated and enlightened with respect to inclusive education. Perhaps, it will be necessary to implement some of the new methods and techniques advocated by inclusive education proponents on a widespread basis before professionals will be convinced of the feasibility and efficacy of such techniques.

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APPENDIX A

PERCENTILE RESPONSES TO FULL INCLUSION SURVEY

SA = Strongly Agree A= Agree U= Undecided D= Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

		SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Students in special education can be educated in a regular classroom with assistance from the special education department.	37	41	00	11	11
2.	Regular education teachers can be responsible for students enrolled in special education.	15	37	22	07	19
3.	Least restrictive environment can be a self-contained classroom.	22	40	11	00	26
4.	Special education teachers in my building are protective of their students.	33	45	00	15	07
5.	A child with an emotional disturbance can function only in a self-contained classroom.	07	15	15	48	15
6.	I believe labeling diminishes student self worth.	41	26	15	11	07
7.	I believe in-services are valuable for the staff.	44	30	00	07	19
8.	A principal must be knowledgeable in the area of Full Inclusion.	68	32	00	00	00
9.	Our staff works well together.	33	37	00	11	19
10.	Children model the behavior of other children.	44	52	00	40	00
11.	Students with learning disabilities who have spatial and time orientation problems would profit from not having to go to a resource room.	03	26	11	30	30
12.	There is too much duplication of services between Chapter 1, special education, bilingual and migrant services.	19	14	00	30	37
13.	Financial resources currently allotted for students with a mild disability could be preserved if such students are reintegrated into full-time regular education.	10	26	19	26	19
14.	Given further preparation & training, I would be able to effectively meet the educational needs of those students currently served by the resource room program.	22	26	11	11	30
15.	Given additional consultative type support, I would be able to meet the educational needs of students with mild disabilities in my class without the need for a resource room.	22	15	11	11	41
16.	The skills needed to teach mildly disabled and nondisabled students are essentially the same.	11	30	25	19	15
17.	Most children currently labeled learning disabled are not "truly" educationally disabled.	11	07	11	49	22

18.	Identifying students for the purpose of providing special education is a discriminatory practice.	07	11	11	49	22
19.	I feel too much staff money and resources has been allocated for the special education program.	00	4	15	59	22
20.	Scheduling difficulties make it impossible to enact the Regular Education Initiative or Full Inclusion.	04	26	18	45	07
21.	Other support personnel (therapists) could take their services into a regular classroom.	22	33	00	30	15
22.	Teachers are uneasy about consultants from the special education department spending time teaching and consulting in their rooms.	30	33	11	11	15

Adapted from: S. Kennedy. (1990). The Regular Education Initiative in the Anchorage Public Schools. Anchorage, AK: Author.